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Thematic Quranic Translation Series Installment 21
(IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE)

Ashaab-e-Kahaf (The Seven Sleepers) versus
Ashaab-e-Raqeem (Those in Authority)
(Chapter al-Kahaf)

The ancient Myth busted thru a modern Academic
and Rational re-translation

PRELUDE

This is another link in the current chain of Thematic Translations from Quran. The foundation of this work rests upon latest human knowledge and the highest level of man's conscious evolution hitherto attained. Effort is made to purify the element of myth and mystery viciously incorporated into Quranic doctrine. Conformity with the overall message of Quranic guidance - which is the harbinger of building a human character on lofty universal values and ideals - is fully observed and maintained. This time the topic under research is the episode of "Ashaab-e-Kahaf and Al-Raqeem" which is stipulated in the Chapter Al-Kahaf of Quran, and has been made a target of distortion into a miraculous tale.

Fake Supernatural narrative of traditional translations and exegeses:

A group of young enthusiasts/stalwarts taking refuge in an unknown CAVE; carrying a treasure with them; lying miraculously in hibernation hundreds of years; the sun sidetracking automatically from above them while on its route, so as not to disturb their sleep; changing of their sides by Allah Himself during their sleep; a "dog" on watch for hundreds of years; intruders shunning away for fear of the dog; at long last, a change taking place in their society and they get awake; decide to send a companion to nearest settlement with old coins for fetching foodstuff;

people in their native place remembering them respectfully, and building a temple in their memory; etc. etc.

Christian background:

This mythically painted tale of Seven Sleepers has its origins in Christian mythology and belongs to that era when Christianity had not yet acquired the status of general acceptance. The followers of this faith had to face the wrath of the Roman Empire. By virtue of the special structure of this tale, it is regarded among miracles in that faith group too. According to relevant traditions this episode depicts the struggle of a group of young and enthusiastic Christians of the city called Ephesus in the era of Roman Emperor Decius in the year 250 AD. Most of its sources have Syriac origins. The Christian Saint Gregory of Tours gave prominence and publicity to this tale in the Christendom through his Book of Miracles edited in the sixth century AD. Later Christian writers added more fiction into it. The venue of this episode and its details were freely subjected to changes, additions and amendments and every time some more exaggeration was employed. This old story was re-written in Quran in its true light and with accurate details, for the reason that in the identical struggle launched by our beloved Prophet Mohammad, this may be brought forth as a guiding and encouraging example.

Adulteration by Muslim Exegetists

It is deplorable that Muslim Interpreters too displayed the same old slave mentality and converted the entire rational and religious foundations of this episode into fiction and miracle; and thus painted an illogical and supernatural picture of it.

Although, what could have explained it more elaborately than Quran, except if they could have kept in view its literary Arabic language, and pondered upon it in an academic way, which was possible only if they had no ill intentions in their working agenda.

The element of Rationality brought forth

Let us now try to bring forth a research based translation that stands on logic and rationality and keeps in view the great classical and literary narrative of Quran's style as well as its original socio-political perspective. All available material on this theme has been studied. Some earlier writers have tried their level best to avoid the fiction-based old translations, but have not succeeded in reaching the insight of Quranic narrative fully, nor have been able to present a satisfactory, consistent, and easily comprehensible translation conforming to the context.

However, their efforts in bringing about a change from the old, corroded pattern of irrational translations are appreciated.

This translation though is a modern and most advanced effort in exposing the truth of a part of Quran in its own true light, yet it can't be declared the last word, or the final decisive verdict, etc. Those busy in purely academic research in exploring the lost true Quranic ideology are invited to inform this writer about their opinion. Any clear error or omission, if noted, may be pointed out. The writer takes full responsibility of un-intentional errors or omissions.

Relevant Quranic Context – Verses 18/1-8:

Let us start with the background of this Episode which spans Verses 1 to 8 of Chapter 18 and is closely related to and is critical of the distortion made into its reality by old Christian clergy.

Verses: 18/1-3

الحمد لله الذي انزل على عبده الكتاب و لم يجعل له عوجا (1) قيما لينذر باسا شديدا من لدنه و و يبشر المؤمنين الذين يعملون الصالحات ان لهم اجرا حسنا (2) ماكتين فيه ابدا (3).

All praise is to Allah Who sent down the Book of Values to His Subject as He does not wish to leave a doubt or ambiguity in the mission entrusted to him. It is a knowledge that bestows solidarity and stability and is meant to forewarn about the severe punishment to come from His end, and to give glad tidings to those people of faith and peace who perform reformative/constructive deeds, that for them is an excellent reward with which they will abide forever.

Verses 18/4-8:

8-4/18: و ينذر الذين قالو اتخذ الله ولدا (4). ما لهم به من علم و لا لآبائهم. كبرت كلمة تخرج من افواههم. ان يقولون الا كذبا (5). فلعلك باخع نفسك على اثارهم ان لم يؤمنوا بهذا الحديث اسفا (6). انا جعلنا ما على الارض زينة لها لنبلوهم ايهم احسن عملا (7). انا لجاعلون ما عليها صعيدا جرزا (8).

Furthermore, it also warns that group of men who assert that God has taken unto Himself a son. No knowledge whatever have they of Him, and neither had their forefathers: dreadful is this saying that comes out of their mouths and nothing but falsehood do they utter! But wouldst thou, perhaps, torment thyself to death with grief over their conduct if they are not willing to believe in this message? Behold,

We have willed that all beauty on earth be a means by which We put them all to a test in self-evolution (لنبلوهم ايهم), on the criterion of best conduct (احسن عملا); and, verily, We shall subject all that is on it to a high degree of destruction.

And NOW the Episode begins :

Verse 18/9:

ام حسبت ان اصحاب الكهف و الرقيم كانوا من آياتنا عجبا

And if you also have reckoned, like the above mentioned group, that the historical episode of those who migrated and took protection in the Divine Guidance (اصحاب) against the authorities of their time (الرقيم) was a miracle out of our signs?

Verse 18/10-12:

12-10/18: اذ اوى الفتية الى الكهف فقالو ربنا آتتنا من لدنك رحمة و هيى لنا من امرنا رشدا (10).
فضربنا على آذانهم فى الكهف سنين عددا (11). ثم بعثناهم لنعلم ائى الحزبين احصى لما لبثوا امدا (12).

It had come to pass that when those youth took refuge in the divine guidance (الكهف), they had beseeched thus: "O our Sustainer! Bestow on us grace from Thyself, and endow us with consciousness of what is right for our mission!" And thereupon We made them set off (فضربنا) by giving ear for a complete learning (على) in our Guidance (فى الكهف) for many years to come. Then we deputed them on its dissemination (بعثناهم) so that we may mark out which of the two opposing fronts has fully covered and understood (احصى) that for which they had passed through (لبثوا) an extreme (امدا) confrontation.

Verses 18/13-15:

115-13/18: نحن نقصُّ عليك نباهم بالحق- ائهم فتية آمنو بربهم و زدناهم هدى (13). وربطنا على قلوبهم اذ قاموا فقالو ربنا رب السموات و الارض لن ندعو من دونه الها - لقد قلنا اذا شططا (14). هؤلاء قومنا اتخذو من دونه آلهة- لو لا ياتون عليهم بسلطان مبين- فمن اظلم ممّن افترى على الله كذبا (15).

We are relating to you the news of them which reflect the truth about them. They were young men who had attained to faith in their Sustainer: and so We had deepened their consciousness about our guidance and endowed their hearts with strength, so that they took a firm stand and proclaimed that their Lord alone was the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth. Never shall we invoke any authority other than Him: If we did, we should indeed have uttered an enormity! These

people of ours have taken to obeying other authorities instead of Him, without being able to adduce any reasonable evidence in support of their beliefs. Therefore, who could be more wicked than he who invents a lie about God?

Verse 18/16:

16/18: و إذا اعتزلتموهم و ما يعبدون الا الله فأووا الى الكهف ينشر لكم ربكم من رحمته و يُهيى لكم من امركم مرفقا (16).

And O people, now that you have withdrawn from them and from all that they obey instead of God, take refuge in the divine guidance (فأووا الى الكهف): God will spread His grace over you, and will endow you all help and assistance in your affairs.

Verse 18/17:

17/18: و ترى الشمس اذا طلعت تزاورُ عن كهفهم ذات اليمين و اذا غربت تقرضهم ذات الشمال و هم فى فجوة منه. ذلك من آياتِ الله. من يهتدِ الله فهو المهتد. و من يضلل فلن تجد له وليا مرشدا (17)

And it is amply clear to you O Messenger that whenever the sun of glory rises (تزارو عن) upon a people, it is always based upon (الشمس اذا طلعت) the same divine guidance that those youth had pursued (كهفهم), and embodies blessings and achievements (ذات اليمين) and when it declines (اذا غربت), it is because the community, by moving away (تقرضهم) from that guidance, becomes undesirable, hateful and devious (ذات الشمال), while those reformers already distance themselves away from it (فجوة منه). These are the open signs as to how God's guidance works. Indeed whom God guides, he alone becomes the guided one (المهتد); whereas, for him whom He lets go astray, thou can never find a protector and guide.

Verse 18/18:

18/18: و تحسبهم ايقاظا و هم رقود. و نقلبهم ذات اليمين و ذات الشمال. و كلبهم باسط ذراعيه بالوصيد. لو اطلعت عليهم لوليت منهم فرارا و لملئت منهم رعبا (18).

And should you reckon that they were rendered incapacitated or killed (ايقاظا), they were rather kept in silent waiting (رقود) during which time our laws kept causing transformations in their community (نقلبهم) embodying progress and blessings (ذات اليمين) and decline and wretchedness (ذات الشمال) in certain degrees. During this time their hard struggle and the intensity of their spirit (كلبهم) continued to expand (باطسط) and stretch its arms in both directions firmly (ذراعيه بالوصيد). Hadst thou come upon

them during that period, thou wouldst surely have turned away from them in flight (لَوَلَّيْتَ مِنْهُمْ فَرَارًا), as you would surely have been filled with awe of them (رَعِبًا).

Verses No.18/19-20:

20-19/18: و كذلك بعثناهم ليتساءلوا بينهم - قال قائل منهم كم لبثتم -- قالو لبثنا يوما او بعض يوم-قالو ربكم اعلم بما لبثتم فابعثوا احدكم بورقكم هذه الى المدينة فلينظر ايها ازكى طعاما، فليا تكم برزق منه و ليتلطف و لا يشعروا بكم احدا (19)- انهم ان يظهروا عليكم يرجموكم او يعيدوكم في ملتهم و لن تفلحوا اذا ابدا (20)-

And in the course of time We directed (بعثناهم) them to hold a decisive discussion among them (ليتساءلوا بينهم). One of them raised the question as to how long a time have you spent (كم لبثتم) in this struggle. Some said that they must have spent a certain period of time (لبثنا يوما), or a part of that period (بعض يوم). Others suggested to let their Sustainer know exactly how long they had endured, but for now, let us depute (فابعثوا) this matured and intelligent one (بورقكم هذه) of your group (احدكم) to the town to assess as to what are the most vital points of information (ازكى طعاما) and then bring you (فليا تكم) the knowledge thereof (برزق) (منه). But let him take extra precaution and use very subtle manners (ليتلطف) and by no means make anyone aware of you (يشعروا بكم): for, behold, if they should capture you, they might subject you to torture (يرجموكم), or forcefully turn you back to their faith (يعيدوكم في ملتهم), in which case you would never attain success in your mission.

Verse 18/21:

21/18: و كذلك اعثرنا عليهم ليعلموا ان وعد الله حق و ان الساعة لا ريب فيها اذ يتنازعون بينهم امرهم، فقالوا ابنوا عليهم بنيانا. ربهم اعلم بهم- قال الذين غلبوا على امرهم لنتخذن عليهم مسجدا (21)-

AND IN THIS way We had drawn the attention of their community to their achievements, so that they might know that God's promise was true, and that there can be no doubt as to approaching time of the final judgment. And so, while they were debating among themselves, some recommended to build (ابنوا) a case against them (عليهم) on solid grounds; God knows best what they have gone through." Said they whose opinion on their plight prevailed in the end: "We shall definitely be taking steps (لنتخذن) by raising a center of submission to surrender (مسجدا) to their teachings".

Verse 18/22:

22/18: سيقولون ثلاثة رابعهم كلبهم و يقولون خمسة سادسهم كلبهم رجما بالغيب. و يقولون سبعة و ثامنهم كلبهم.. قل ربى اعلم بعدتہم ما يعلمہم الا قليل. - فلا تمار فيہم الا مرآء ظاہرا و لا تستفت فيہم منهم احدا (22).

Some will continue to gossip that they were three, the fourth of them being their dog; while others will say they were five, with their dog as the sixth of them, idly guessing at something of which they can have no knowledge. And some will say, they were seven, the eighth of them being their dog. Say: "My Sustainer knows best how many they were. They had very little knowledge of them. Hence, do not argue with people about them in the absence of an obvious argument, and do not issue a conclusive statement about them to anyone.

Verse 18/23-24:

24-23/18: و لا تقولن لشيء ائى فاعل ذلك غدا (23). الا ان يشاء الله. و اذكر ربك اذا نسيت و قل عسى ان يهدين ربى لا قرب من هذا رشدا (24).

AND NEVER say about anything, "Behold, I shall do this tomorrow," without adding, "if God so wills." And if thou should ever lose the right track, do invoke your Lord's attributes and say: "I pray that my Sustainer guide me, even closer than this, to a consciousness of what is right!"

Verses 18/25-27:

27-25/18: و لبثو فى كهفہم ثلاث مائة سنين وازدادوا تسعا (25). قل الله اعلم بما لبثوا. له غيب السموات و الارض. ابصر به و اسمع. ما لهم من دونه من ولى و لا يشرك فى حكمه احدا (26). و اتل ما أوحى اليك من كتاب ربك. لا مبدل لكلماته و لن تجد من دونه ملتحدا (27).

AND according to them they remained in their shelter three hundred years; and some have added nine to that number. Tell them, only God knows best how long they remained there. For Him alone is the knowledge of the hidden reality of the heavens and the earth: how well does He see and hear! No guardian have they apart from Him, since He allots to no one a share in His rule!" AND follow closely whatever has been revealed to thee of thy Sustainer's writ. There is nothing that could alter His words; and thou canst find no refuge other than with Him.

AND NOW a running translation without interruptions:

All praise is to Allah Who sent down the Book of Values to His Subject as He does not wish to leave a doubt or ambiguity in the mission entrusted to him. It is a

knowledge that bestows solidarity and stability and is meant to forewarn about the severe punishment to come from His end, and to give glad tidings to those people of faith and peace who perform reformative/constructive deeds in the society, that for them is an excellent reward with which they will abide forever.

Furthermore, it also warns that group of men who assert that God has taken unto Himself a son. No knowledge whatever have they of Him, and neither had their forefathers: dreadful is this saying that comes out of their mouths and nothing but falsehood do they utter! But wouldst thou, perhaps, torment thyself to death with grief over them if they are not willing to believe in this message? Behold, We have willed that all beauty on earth be a means by which We put them all to a test in self-evolution, on the criterion of best conduct; and, verily, We shall subject all that is on it to a high degree of destruction.

And if you also have reckoned, like the above mentioned group, that the historical episode of those who migrated and took protection in the Divine Guidance against the authorities of their time was a miracle out of our signs?

It had come to pass that when those youth took refuge in the divine guidance, they had beseeched thus: "O our Sustainer! Bestow on us grace from Thyself, and endow us with consciousness of what is right for our mission!" And thereupon We made them set off by giving ear for a complete learning in our Guidance for many years to come. Then we deputed them on its dissemination so that we may mark out which of the two opposing fronts has fully covered and understood that for which they had passed through an extreme confrontation.

We are relating to you the news of them which reflect the truth about them. They were young men who had attained to faith in their Sustainer: and so We had deepened their consciousness about our guidance and endowed their hearts with strength, so that they took a firm stand and proclaimed that their Lord alone was the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth. Never shall we invoke any authority other than Him: If we did, we should indeed have uttered an enormity! These people of ours have taken to obeying other authorities instead of Him, without being able to adduce any reasonable evidence in support of their beliefs. Therefore, who could be more wicked than he who invents a lie about God?

And O people, now that you have withdrawn from them and from all that they obey instead of God, take refuge in the divine guidance: God will spread His grace over you, and will endow you all help and assistance in your affairs.

And it is amply clear to you O Messenger that whenever the sun of glory rises upon a people, it is always based upon the same divine guidance that those youth had pursued, and embodies blessings and achievements and when it declines, it is because the community by moving away from that guidance, becomes undesirable, hateful and devious while those reformers already distance themselves away from it. These are the open signs as to how God's guidance works. Indeed whom God guides, he alone becomes the guided one; whereas for him whom He lets go astray thou can never find a protector and guide.

And should you reckon that they were rendered incapacitated or killed, they were rather kept in silent waiting during which time our laws kept causing transformation in their community embodying progress and blessings and decline and wretchedness in certain degrees. During this time their hard struggle and the intensity of their spirit continued to expand and stretch its arms in both directions firmly. Had you come upon them during that period, thou would surely have turned away from them in flight, as you would surely have been filled with awe of them.

And in the course of time We directed them to hold a decisive discussion among them. One of them raised the question as to how long a time have you spent in this struggle. Some said that they must have spent a certain period of time, or a part of that period. Others suggested to let their Sustainer know exactly how long they had endured, but for now let us depute this matured and intelligent one of your group to the town to assess as to what are the most vital points of information and then bring you the knowledge thereof . But let him take extra precaution and use very subtle manners and by no means make anyone aware of you: for, behold, if they should capture you, they might subject you to torture, or forcefully turn you back to their faith, in which case you would never attain success in your mission.

AND IN THIS way We had drawn the attention of their community to their achievements, so that they might know that God's promise was true, and that there can be no doubt as to approaching time of the final judgment. And so, while they were debating among themselves, some recommended to build a case against them on solid grounds; God knows best what they have gone through." Said they whose opinion on their plight prevailed in the end: "We shall definitely be taking steps by raising a center of submission to surrender to their teachings".

Some will continue to gossip that they were three, the fourth of them being their dog; while others will say they were five, with their dog as the sixth of them, idly guessing at something of which they can have no knowledge. And some will say,

they were seven, the eighth of them being their dog. Say: "My Sustainer knows best how many they were. They had very little knowledge of them. Hence, do not argue with people about them in the absence of an obvious argument, and do not issue a conclusive statement about them to anyone.

AND NEVER say about anything, "Behold, I shall do this tomorrow," without adding, "if God so wills." And if thou should ever lose the right track, do invoke your Lord's attributes and say: "I pray that my Sustainer guide me, even closer than this, to a consciousness of what is right!"

AND according to them they remained in their shelter three hundred years; and some have added nine to that number. Tell them, only God knows best how long they remained there. He alone has the knowledge of the hidden reality of the heavens and the earth: how well does He see and hear! No guardian have they apart from Him, since He allots to no one a share in His rule!" AND follow closely whatever has been revealed to thee of thy Sustainer's writ. There is nothing that could alter His words; and thou canst find no refuge other than with Him.

Important words in parenthesis defined from 10 authentic lexicons

Ashaabul Kahaf: kahaf: place of protection; cave, place of refuge, safety and settlement; a helpful person.

Al-Kahaf: a particular place of protection; a shelter provided by God; to come under the safety and protection of Divine Teachings.

Al-Raqeem: Raqam: something written, book, writing, inscription, intelligence, star-studded sky; the elite class of a time; ruling class; people of authority.

Ba'athna-hum; Ba'atha: Anything that is sent; Rousing, exciting, putting in motion or motion; Incited, urged, instigated or awoke.

Raising/rousing (e.g. of the dead to life); Sleepless or wakeful;
Hastening, quick, swift in going, impelled or propelled.

Ahsaa احصى: HSY: to number/count/calculate/count/compute a thing, to reckon a thing, reach the last number of a thing, collect into an aggregate by numbering, retain a thing in the memory, understand a thing, register/record the number of a thing, comprehend or know a thing altogether.

Ash-Shams الشمس: The Sun; to be bright with sunshine, be glorious, be sunny.
shams - Sun is a symbol of glory.

Tala'at طلعت: Tala': to ascend/rise, go up, learn, come on, come towards anyone, start from, climb upon, reach, sprout, notice, look, seek, examine, expose, explain, appear, inform, occur, consider, know. tal'un - the spathe or sheath in which the flowers of the date palm are enclosed, also the fruit when it first appears, fruit, ranged dates. tuluu - rising. matla'un - twilight of rising (of sun). atla'a (vb. 4) - to make manifest to anyone, cause one to understand. ittala'a for itta'ala'a (vb. 8) - to mount up, penetrate. attala'a for a'attala'a - has he penetrated (here the hamzah of union waslah being omitted after the interrogative hamzah).

Tazawar تزاور: visit, visitor, incline towards, he honoured him, falsify/beautify/embellish, lie/untruth, adjust/correct, decline or turn aside from it, determination.

Al-Yameen اليمين: right side, right, right hand, oath, bless, lead to the right, be a cause of blessing, prosperous/fortunate/lucky.

Gharabat غربت: Gharaba: went/passed away, depart/retire/remove/disappear, become remote/distant/absent/hidden/black, withdraw, western, foreign/strange, exceed, abundance, sharpness, (maghrib = sunset), black, raven-black, setting place of the sun, the west.

Taqridh-hum; Qaradha; تقرضهم، ق ر ض; to cut, turn away from, severe, do good deed.

Zaatush-Shimaal ذات الشمال; Shimaal: The opposite of Al-Yameen; a disunited and discomposed state of affairs; undesirable, hateful, devilish nature; tendency towards the left; misfortune; north, northwards.

Fijwatan فجوة; opening, set apart, open wide, a fissure. Separation, a wide distance, decline in power and authority.

Eeqadhan ايقاضا; w q dh; to beat to death, beat severely, strike violently, be killed by a blow.

Raqood رقود; r q d : to sleep, lull, be dull, ragged, overlook. ruqud - sleeping.
marqad - bed, sleeping place, grave.

Kalab, Kalabu-hum ك ل ب كلبهم; Dog, a savage animal, seized by rage, madness, be filled with intense emotions, hardship, antagonism, hydrophobia, greed, to eagerly desire, it became severe or intense, he pressed hard or vehemently.

Baasitun باسط، بسط; to expand, expanded, stretched.

Dhra'i-hi ذراعیه; ذراع; fore legs, both arms, strength, measure, length, ability, capability, to stretch to great length.

Bil Waseed بالوصيد; وصد: Fast, strong, firmly established in its place, to stand up, to mobilize resources, treasury, to build a store, etc.

Bi-Waraqi-kum ورق بورقكم; piece of paper, paper from a book, document, addresses, prime of youth, freshness, beauty, silver, silver coin; A youth in his prime; young ones of a group/community.

Fal-yanzur: فلينظر; نظر: He looks, analyzes, assesses, studies, gets knowledge and awareness.

Azkaa Ta'aman ازكى طعاما: a best and complete study and knowledge of affairs: Ta'aam; food, acquisition, inoculation, to impart knowledge, to equip with knowledge.

Azkaa: z k w; ازكى; زكى; زكو: Holder of the best of knowledge, strength, growth; developed, prosperous, pure, truth, abundance, be in the right state, dues from taxes.

Bi-rizqin رزق برزق; Razaqa: Offered, provided for, granted, prize, gift, share, to give means of sustenance

Wal-yatalattaf وليتلف; ل ط ف: softness, subtleness, politeness, grace, kindness, fineness, considerate, to take care in suffering, to comfort, to present a gift, etc.

Rijman bil-Ghayib رجما بالغيب; رجم; ر ج م: To speculate, to assess wrongly, to stone, to condemn, to kick out, to curse, to crush land under feet.

Ghayib: غيب: Invisible, away from sight, beyond imagination, false complaining.

Sad-Ayn-Dal = to ascend, mount, run, move with quick steps faster than when walking, go up, be hard (affair).

Jiim-Ra-Zay = To cut or cut off, destroy or exterminate, to slay, to eat quickly or eat much, to be or become barren, to be lean or emaciated, to be dried up and without herbage.

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